

20 MAY 1975

Files Said to Link Mafia To C.I.A. in '61 Castro Plot

By NICHOLAS M. HORROCK

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 19—The Rockefeller commission has learned of documents supporting the charge that the Central Intelligence Agency contracted with the Mafia in a plot in 1961 to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, authoritative sources reported today.

According to these sources, a former top official of the Department of Justice during the Nixon Administration has told the commission in secret testimony that department files contain Federal Bureau of Investigation memorandums that confirm that the C.I.A. was in touch with Sam Giancana, a Chicago rackets chief, and John Roselli, a soldier of fortune with organized crime connections, in a plot to assassinate Mr. Castro.

The existence of the documents is the first public indication that there is written material to support a long-standing allegation that the agency conspired with organized crime figures in such an assassination attempt.

The file, the sources said, has been found and is now in the hands of John C. Keeney, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the department's Criminal Division.

Mr. Keeney is expected to transfer the documents to the commission, which is looking into Government intelligence operations. He declined to comment on the matter. David W. Belin, chief counsel to the commission headed by Vice President Rockefeller, also declined to comment. This has been standard practice for the commission.

As early as 1967, Jack Anderson, the syndicated columnist, reported allegations that Robert A. Mahau, a former F.B.I. agent and manager of Las Vegas properties for the billionaire Howard R. Hughes, recruited Mr. Giancana and Mr. Roselli in a plot to assassinate Mr. Castro.

According to Mr. Anderson's version, Mr. Roselli, with C.I.A. help, organized one attempted assassination of the Cuban leader in which agents were armed with poison capsules supplied by the agency. In another attempt, these reports said, the group tried to infiltrate rifle sharpshooters into Cuba to kill Mr. Castro during a public meeting.

The sources familiar with the existing files said they did not know if the files went into such detail. But they do confirm that both Mr. Giancana and Mr. Roselli had been working with the C.I.A. at the time, these sources said.

One source said the file contained a memorandum signed by J. Edgar Hoover, the late director of the F.B.I. in which Mr. Hoover discussed whether Mr. Giancana's C.I.A. connections may have protected him from the full weight of a Justice Department prosecution in the mid-nineteen-sixties. Another source said the files showed that Mr. Roselli's relationship with the intelligence agency came up during an investigation of him by the Justice Department.

There is no information available from present sources whether the assassination attempt was approved by President Kennedy or any other high Kennedy Administration official. Two former aides to Robert F. Kennedy, Attorney General at the time, told the New York Times several months ago that Mr. Kennedy told them about the C.I.A. plotting with racket figures.

Plot Turned Off

In interviews, Adam Walinsky and Peter Edelman said Mr. Kennedy told them he had found out about the plot and "turned it off."

The alleged assassination plots took place in 1961, according to several sources and press reports.

In the mid-nineteen-sixties both Mr. Giancana and Mr. Roselli were the subjects of organized crime prosecutions by the Justice Department in separate cases. Mr. Giancana was the subject of a big investigation by the United States Attorney for Chicago, then Edward V. Hanrahan, and the field office of the F.B.I.

He was taken before a grand jury in 1961 granted immunity but refused to answer questions. Federal judge ordered Giancana jailed under contempt for the life grand jury. Mr. Giancana 12 months in the Cook jail as a result. He ref talk.

After his release, Mr. han recommended that grand jury be called a Giancana be given im and jailed again if he refused to answer questions. The Justice Department decided wise and the prosecution halted. Mr. Giancana moved to Mexico.

According to sources familiar with the content of the Mr. Hoover became convinced that Mr. Giancana had received preferential treatment because of his connection with C.I.A.

Mr. Hoover, these sources noted in the memorandums that Attorney General Kennedy had told him that Giancana had cooperated with the C.I.A. and that if the department put too much pressure on greatly he could compel the agency.

Nevertheless, several sources said the C.I.A. connection was not a factor in the mid-1960s decision to halt the prosecution. William Hundley, a Washington lawyer formerly in charge of the organized crime section at Justice, said the decision not to bring Mr. Giancana before a new grand jury had been made purely because the department felt this would be harassment and would rest on shaky legal ground.

He said that at the time he had no knowledge of Mr. Giancana's reported connections with the C.I.A. and that no one above him in the department had attempted to put pressure on him.

Roselli Convicted

It was also in the mid-nineteen-sixties that Mr. Roselli came under Justice Department scrutiny. He was convicted of failing to register as an alien and of conspiracy to rig card games at Los Angeles' Friars Club.

Mr. Roselli's lawyers at one point sought to get clemency for the former gambler on the grounds of his cooperation with the intelligence agency. A source said that files within the Justice Department both mentioned the request for clemency and confirmed the relationship between Mr. Roselli and the C.I.A. This source said there was no indication that Mr. Roselli received clemency for his work.

"He's done time, hasn't he?" the source asked rhetorically.

vana," a source familiar with this scenario said. Organized crime leaders would privately take credit to support this story, it was said.

Top Administration sources have cautioned that it would be very dangerous "to speculate on whether the plot to kill Mr. Castro was ever approved on the White House level of government."

Several witnesses before the Rockefeller commission have said that assassinations plots may have been "discussed" at various levels of government but were not approved. John A. McCone, who was the C.I.A. director during this period, has said that whenever the assassination of Mr. Castro was brought up "it was rejected immediately."

The Rockefeller commission was assigned to investigate reported plots to assassinate foreign leaders after President Ford became concerned about in-

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(orig under HORROCK)